



Print Journals: Off Site? Out of Site? Out of Mind?

By: Amy K. Weiss & **John P. Abbott**

Abstract

With paper journals seemingly decreasing in importance, libraries need to consider issues of space allocation and storage of journal volumes. Space solutions may include shelving in open, closed, and/or compact shelving, mass storage in off-site, or onsite, facilities, or even discarding the paper and relying on electronic access. Any solution involving the current paper collections will have a serious impact on technical services. This workshop explores these issues in light of the experiences of Appalachian State University, which is in the planning stages of a new library.

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Print Journals: Off Site? Out of Site? Out of Mind?

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Workshop Leaders

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Recorder

SUMMARY. With paper journals seemingly decreasing in importance, libraries need to consider issues of space allocation and storage of journal volumes. Space solutions may include shelving in open, closed, and/or compact shelving, mass storage in off-site, or onsite, facilities, or even discarding the paper and relying on electronic access. Any solution involving the current paper collections will have a serious impact on technical services. This workshop explores these issues in light of the experiences of Appalachian State University, which is in the planning stages of a new library. [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>>]

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WHY WE ARE HERE: THE CURRENT SITUATION AT APPALACHIAN STATE

John Abbott began the workshop with a description of the current university library and the early planning, and politics, surrounding the new library. Appalachian State University was founded as a teachers' college and normal school in 1899. It is now a Carnegie Comprehensive Institution of 12,500 students, with some 900 graduate students, many of whom are among the 800 distance-learning students, and was recently named by *Time Magazine* as "Masters-Level College of the Year." It is part of a consortium with two other University of North Carolina (UNC) system schools—UNC-Asheville and Western Carolina University. The libraries share a common catalog and document delivery system.

The library at Appalachian State, constructed in the late 1960s and enlarged in 1980, is currently full, and the journal stacks are "beyond full." It is expected that the new library will open in 2005 or 2006. Initial funding proposals called for a building of 300,000 gross square feet, but current plans are for about 215,000 gross square foot, with about 150,000 assignable square feet (usable space for collections and people).

THE PLANNING PROCESS

User Survey

In 2001 a survey was taken to ascertain what student, faculty, and alumni wanted in the new library. Students wanted group and quiet study areas, more books, networked computers, scanners, and fax machines, better copiers, full software suites, expanded media holdings, and e-journals. Faculty wanted open stacks, wired carrels, more electronic classrooms, and more print journals. Recent alumni wanted access to more Internet materials. All asked for more online databases, better lighting, and a snack/coffee bar.

Early Thinking

The University administration encouraged the library staff to think creatively, and a generous budget was provided for visits to other institutions with recently completed, new libraries. Many felt that the new

library paradigm should push electronic access as far as it would go; some went so far as to advocate tossing the paper and relying on e-access. Funding and politics quickly stifled that idea. There was talk about the library's role as the university's "information commons" and there were debates on the future role of print journals, back-file retention, and the need for remote storage.

Recall that on the user survey, only the faculty listed print journals as a priority. However, the library staff is reasonably confident that most paper print journals and government documents will be history within a decade. To this end several visits were made to institutions with storage facilities. Of particular interest was the on-site facility at Sonoma State University. The Jean and Charles Schulz Information Center stores 750,000 items in floor-to-ceiling bins. The automated retrieval system (see <http://libweb.sonoma.edu/about/schulz/retsys.html>) can deliver the requested item in about 5 minutes. Other storage facilities visited, such as Harvard and Duke, tended to be large remote facilities with considerably longer turn-around times.

Reality

The cost of a Sonoma-like facility (\$2-3 million) was high, but in the realm of the possible. Unfortunately, a rumor that the library was planning on using such an innovative system ignited a firestorm of protest among some of the faculty. Forward thinking librarians discovered just how traditionally minded, and politically powerful, many of the teaching faculty can be. Abbott reports that they ultimately adopted "moderately-inaccessible on-site storage, commonly known as compact shelving." This shelving will contain the entire (current and bound) paper journal and government documents collections. It will be on the ground floor, and there will be no room for a reading room or for the display of new periodicals.

While this solution is less innovative than the original plans, and may cause problems in the short term, Abbott feels that not building a storage facility is good for the long-term for a medium-sized academic library. If his predictions of the stability of the electronic medium and the demise of the paper journal prove correct, he expects that, eventually, the paper collection will be discarded, and the compact shelving used for books.

Abbott ended his portion of the workshop with the view that small and medium libraries should not attempt to emulate the large research libraries. "A small library's bailiwick," he said, "is service, not collec-

tions. If it isn't used, weed it and borrow it when it is needed." Additionally, Abbott proposed that to assure the on-going construction and operation of research universities' huge storage facilities, small and medium-sized libraries contribute a small amount (perhaps \$0.10) per volume for each volume withdrawn from the smaller library's collections. These funds would be collected by the cataloging utility as part of the symbol removal and the funds transferred, as either endowment or liquid assets, to the large in-state or regional academic library that agrees to aggressively store and make available low-use books and journals.

TECHNICAL SERVICES ISSUES

Amy Weiss then talked in general about technical services issues involved in planning and maintaining any storage facility, remote or on-site. She also discussed issues regarding the weeding of journal collections and arrangement of materials in compact shelving. She emphasized the importance of intellectual access for materials that are not physically accessible to users.

For those interested in off-site storage, Amy recommended Nitecki and Kendrick's book "Library off-site shelving" (2001). Nitecki and Kendrick state that large, off-site facilities lead to what they refer to as "the paradox of off-site" which is as follows:

For such sites we take the least used of our collection, and then we

- Inventory them
- Ensure online bibliographic access
- Develop a convenient way to request the material, usually through the online catalog or the Web
- Pull collections from stacks and deliver to a centralized pick-up point
- Provide free copying and faxing
- Implement sophisticated inventory control and operational procedures
- Provide better security
- Provide a superior preservation environment, relative to the open stack libraries on campus

In other words, a library may expend significant resources to preserve and provide access to little-used collections.

Weiss recommended looking at the University of California's Southern Regional Library Facility (SRLF) as an example of what goes into the creation and maintenance of a large, off-site facility (see <http://www.srlf.ucla.edu/>). The SRLF will store only one copy of each item, and requires that the library that submits an item for storage supply a catalog record for that item.

If the library is unable to build a large-scale facility, the issues for technical services remain the same: users need to know what the library has, where it is located, and how users can access it. If these conditions are not met, materials should be discarded. Weiss shared a picture of Appalachian's "storage of shame"—items stored in boxes in a closet, with no effective means of retrieval.

ARRANGEMENT IN STORAGE

There are several possible ways of arranging stored items. An arrangement paralleling the main collection requires minimal cataloging maintenance, usually just a location change. However, adding items to the storage facility may require periodical shifting. An arrangement similar to the "old" collection is possible when you have materials in an obsolete classification scheme, such as Cutter or Dewey, while the library's main collection is arranged by Library of Congress classification. This old collection can be stored as is. Accession numbers will work for large or small facilities, but it takes an up front commitment of staff time to keep the numbers in order.

WEEDING

Appalachian State expects to perform major weeding of the journal collection, prior to the move to the new library. Discarding journals has a major impact on technical services. Areas of involvement will include gifts, transfers, and discarding and recycling materials.

If the journal is of no value to your library but you feel the need to offer it as a gift to other libraries, keep in mind:

- The need to publicize the journals available as gifts.
- The need to store the materials while they are waiting to be sent to the other libraries.
- The need to pack and ship the items, and possibly absorb the cost of shipping the materials.

The library should avoid the "National Geographic syndrome"; i.e., don't offer something as a gift just because it seems too nice to throw away.

Transferring items within the library requires location changes in the catalog. It may also involve updating holdings. Discarding and recycling also requires changes in the catalog, and will require physical work, especially if bindings need to be removed prior to recycling.

ALPHABETICAL ARRANGEMENT VS. CLASSIFICATION OF JOURNALS

At the time of the workshop, Appalachian State was debating the pros and cons of keeping the paper journals in alphabetical (title) order versus classifying the collection. The issues surrounding this decision include the fact that the journals will be going into compact shelving in the new library, and the probability that the journal collection will be steadily decreasing in size as more materials become available electronically.

Alphabetical Order: Pros and Cons

There is a perception of ease of access; i.e., if you know the title, you can find it without consulting the catalog. There is also a perception that less shifting is required than in a classified collection, though there does not appear to be any actual proof that this is the case.

However, bound titles may differ from the journal's real title, and unless the user has read and understood the binding title note in the catalog, they may not be able to locate their journal. Journals may get out of order, as the workers shelving books may or may not understand the ALA filing rules. Title changes will be dispersed throughout the stacks, which may confuse users.

Classified Collection: Pros and Cons

Classification offers ease of subject access, which could be very useful, when someone asks for "all the journals" on a given topic. At present the only way the Appalachian staff can accommodate such a request is to provide a list based on the fund code. Title changes stay together—continuations stay with the preceding title in a classified collection. Classification aids in browsing the journal collection. Teaching

faculty at Appalachian have talked of the importance of serendipitous browsing in the stacks. However, compact shelving may nullify this advantage.

That said, classified collections require lots of shifting, which is even more onerous in compact shelving than in regular stacks. Finally, there is the question of whether retrospective conversion is worth the effort; if the journal collection is shrinking; it could be, given the advantages listed above. As the collection shrinks, it could more easily be integrated into the main stacks. On the other hand, it would be easier to wait and classify a smaller collection in the future.

WORKFLOW: PRINT VS. ELECTRONIC JOURNALS

Staffing, workflow, and tasks may differ in the move away from print journals toward electronic journal collections. For example, traditional check-in may well vanish; University of Nevada, Reno, has already discontinued it. However, accurately notifying patrons of capricious and ephemeral online holdings will require more work than paper check-in ever did. A lower budget for local binding and less complex tasks for the binding assistants will be balanced against the need to trust vendors to archive and update their files as needed. Less time will be spent shelving journals and more time will be spent online, but low-level employees will need to be retrained to perform online maintenance.

Appalachian's current journal statistics are based on the number of times a journal is re-shelved. For online journals librarians are dependent on vendor statistics, which vary in quality and usefulness. Libraries must demand better statistics or develop local work-arounds. As for cataloging, in the immediate future, there will be more access to parts of journals through aggregators than access to true full content, with the result that more time will be spent creating brief records or editing templates for use by vendors such as Ebsco or Serials Solutions.

As for government documents, similar issues exist for documents collections as for periodical collections. The government is committed to electronic access of government information. Currently, documents assistants spend a lot of time checking-in, stamping, labeling, and pulling runs for binding. The switch to electronic access suggests that more time will be spent on database maintenance, URL checking, and discarding print materials.

Weiss concluded her presentation with these words: "Whether you're building a new facility or keeping a current library up-to-date,

determining the role and importance of print journals for your library will be an important aspect of serials librarianship in the coming decade."

DISCUSSION

The post-workshop discussion centered on the future of the paper journals. The presenters indicated that they had not yet developed a timetable for weeding the collection, and that faculty are involved in weeding decisions.

Much of the discussion revolved around the question of the reliability of online journals. Many faculty continue to demand paper. Some online versions of articles lack graphics (often a copyright issue for the vendor). Some of the participants said that they had become disillusioned with the reliability of the online versions and were purchasing paper back-files of previously cancelled journals. There was certainly no groundswell of sentiment among the participants that libraries could discard their paper file any time soon.

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CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES

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